

Using Articles and Prepositions

Goals

This workshop focuses on the appropriate use of articles and prepositions in well-crafted sentences. The first fifteen minutes will consist of reviewing the key terms and concepts, and the preparatory activity, from these pre-workshop materials, which student attendees are expected to read and complete in advance (the workshop is not a teacher-centered lesson in rules). Following that brief review, in the remaining thirty minutes students will dynamically interact with each other and the Writing Center consultant while actively engaging their own and others' work.

Materials Needed

In order to participate fully in the workshop, bring the following:

- A laptop or tablet with wireless internet capability (to access these materials during the workshop)
- Your completed preparatory exercise (see "Preparatory Activity" below)
- An essay you have written or are writing, whose articles and prepositions you would like to explore

Topic Overview

Articles and prepositions can be difficult to master because the rules that govern them are complex and can change depending on the context of a sentence; thus, learning proper usage requires proofreading one's work and practice with sentence patterns. **Articles** may be **indefinite** or **definite**, and they identify nouns that are **countable** or **non-countable**, as well as nouns that are **specified** or **unspecified**. There are also instances when **no article** is required. Regarding **prepositions**, their function is to connect either nouns or pronouns to another part of a sentence, whether with a single word or in a **prepositional phrase**.

Key Terms and Concepts

- **Count and Non-Count Nouns:** Since articles depend on noun type, it is important to know which nouns are countable and which are not. Count nouns are persons, places, or things that can be tallied, and because they are individual units, these can be made plural. By contrast, non-count nouns are group, mass, or collective and therefore cannot be tallied or pluralized.
- **Indefinite Articles:** Use "a" or "an" before singular count nouns if the noun is **unspecified** (readers do not know the person, place, or thing to which the noun refers). For example, "He bought a book" or "It took an hour." Indefinite articles are not used before plural nouns, and do not apply to non-count nouns because they describe a noun in unitary form.
- **Definite Article:** Use "the" before singular or plural nouns that are **specified** (readers know the person, place, or thing to which the noun refers). Definite articles may describe both count and non-count nouns because both unitary and collective nouns can be specific. For example, "I bought the latest book by that author" or "The sun is bright."
- **No Article:** Articles should not be used when a noun is non-count and not specific (for example, "My father cooked dinner"), a singular proper noun (for example, "We visited Mount Everest"), or a plural count noun (for example, "I submitted my papers").

- **Prepositions:** These are connecting words that serve many functions. For instance, they link related words, illustrate specific circumstances, locate specific spaces and times, indicate directions, and demonstrate how something happens (for example, “at, by, for, from, in, of, on, to, with, about, above, across, after, against, along, amid, among, around, before, behind, below, beneath, beside, between, beyond, but, despite, during, except, inside, into, like, near, onto, outside, over, past, since, through, toward, under, underneath, unlike, until, up, upon, versus, within, without”).
- **Prepositional Phrases:** These contain more than one word to establish relationships in time and space, putting not only objects in a descriptive context, but also ideas and facts (for example, “according to, along with, apart from, because of, by way of, due to, except for, in addition to, in case of, in front of, in regard to, in place of, in spite of, instead of, next to, on account of, on top of, out of, up to, with the exception of”). Rhetorically, such phrases help create greater argumentative logic.

Additional Resources

- For a concise overview of articles and prepositions, go to the [USC Writing Center’s website](#) for the resources titled “Using Articles” and “Introduction to Prepositions.”
- For additional information on articles and prepositions, visit the Purdue Online Writing Lab’s pages:
 - [Basic rules on prepositions](#)
 - [Basic rules on articles](#)
 - [Articles \(“a” versus “an”\)](#)
 - [Count and non-count nouns](#)
 - To practice these lessons in your own time, try these exercises:
 - [Articles](#)
 - [Count and non-count nouns](#)
 - [Prepositions](#)

Preparatory Activity

The passage below contains many opportunities to practice articles and prepositions. Please print this page and then circle each instance in the paragraph in which an article is missing, incorrect, or unnecessary. Write the correct article above the text. Draw an X if the article should be removed.

Next, underline each of the prepositions and prepositional phrases in the paragraph. Note the ways in which they are used to indicate relationships, link words, and create logic.

In 1950 film *Rashomon*, Akira Kurosawa establishes ominous mood by opening with scenes of fog and rain. A camera tracks characters like woodcutter into leafy forests, across bridges, and up the hills and mountains. However, it not only follows behind these characters but tilts upward, pans around, and zooms closely into their faces. In addition to camera movement, Kurosawa often makes the image like the painting, using triangular compositions and golden ratio. For example, in a scene with wooden cottage, a house is placed near left side of the frame instead of the center. Altogether, Kurosawa’s cinematography consistently provides a viewer with multiple perspectives to convey message that all sides of the story must be examined. In other words, the truth can change according to the person’s point of view.